



A STUDY OF SIR SYED'S ALIGARH MOVEMENT: FROM VISION TO MISSION

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ABSTRACT

The Aligarh Movement was launched by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan along with his associates for the renaissance of Indian Muslims in the second half of the 19th century. Though this movement was multi-dimensional with respect to social, political, economic and educational issues of Muslim community but it was more inclined to the educational aspect. According to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, it is education which could minimize the sufferings of Indians particularly Muslims. Sir Syed was always secular in his approach but well aware of the fact that it was his community who had suffered most after the defeat in the Revolt of 1857. In Delhi alone, thousands of Ulama (Islamic religious scholars) were hanged and thousands were abandoned who had a glorious past in the Mughal era. Many of the Muslims educational institutions (maktabs and madrasas) were destroyed by the British on the account of the uprising led by the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. In this paper, an attempt has been made to identify the influences on ideology of Syed Ahmad Khan which had broadened his vision leading to launch the mission for the betterment of his community from backwardness in the changed scenario.

KEYWORDS: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Aligarh Movement, Shah Waliullah, All India Muslim Educational Conference, M.A.O. College, Scientific Society.

Introduction:

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was born on 17th October, 1817 in Delhi. His family was highly regarded by the Mughal court. He was the first Indian Muslim to contribute to the intellectual and institutional foundation of Muslim modernization in Southern Asia. Sir Syed contradicted the prevalent British views regarding the uprising of 1857 and presented his views in a well-known memorandum "*Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*" (The Causes of Indian Revolt) which he forwarded to the British government in 1858.

During the 1850s he developed a strong desire for the spread of western-style education among Indian Muslims while maintaining the traditional values. In this paper, an attempt has been to identify the influences on ideology of Syed Ahmad Khan which had broadened his vision leading to launch the mission for the betterment of his community from backwardness in the changed scenario.

Objectives:

1. To identify the influences on ideology of Syed Ahmad Khan that had broadened his vision.
2. To study how the mission of Sir Syed had started for the betterment of his community from backwardness in the changed scenario.

Sources of Data Collection:

The present work has relied mostly on the library resources including the primary and secondary sources. The studies relevant to the emergence of Aligarh Movement comprised books, theses, dissertations etc. and research journals and encyclopaedias.

Research Methodology:

In the present study is primarily historical in nature. Besides extensive review of literature, descriptive methods have been used in the interpretation of facts.

SIR SYED'S VISION

Shah Waliullah's thought of *ijtihad* inspired Sir Syed

In regard to Sir Syed's vision, his ideology and views on various things are an extension of Waliullahi school of thought (Ansari, 2001). Shah Waliullah was one of the most distinguished personalities of Islam in the earlier part of eighteenth century India. He was born in Delhi and got his early education from his well-known father Shah Abdul Rahim who is recognized to have contributed in the collection of the comprehensive work of *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* during Aurangzeb's reign. Shah Waliullah was trained by his father in the field of Islamic studies and Sufism. Shah Waliullah had very soon realized the turbulent and struggling phase of the later Mughal emperors. He was very much concerned about downfall of Mughal regime which he had anticipated. He was also patron of *Madrasa Rahimiyah* in Delhi. This institution was famous in the Indian sub-continent for the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. Shah Waliullah was the first to advocate for the regular and organized teaching of *hadith* in madrasas (Sikand, 2005).

Like Shah Waliullah, Sir Syed being a victim of the turmoil of the revolt of 1857 too identified the social, political and educational erosion of Muslims in India. Sir Syed after returning from England had drastically modified his vision for the

betterment of Muslims. He advocated for scientific modern education along with religious education. Soon he commenced a monthly periodical *Tehzibul-Akhlaq* (A Mohammedian Social Reformer) in Urdu. It incorporated religious, social and educational concepts in a courageous spirit. Through this medium he tried to spread awareness and knowledge of modern subjects and promote reforms in Muslim society (Alam, 1978).

Sir Syed advocated use of English in modern education but at the same time made a lot of effort so that government recognised Urdu as an official language in the North-Western Provinces (Sherwani, 1944). He had published many writings promoting liberal and rational interpretations of Islamic scriptures as he felt that orthodoxy was intimidating in the progress of the Muslims. However, his liberal views were met with criticism by the traditional Muslim scholars and thus Sir Syed decided to stop discussing religion and focused on advancement of education among Muslims.

Syed Ahmad's sojourn to England

Syed Ahmad's visit to England in 1869 was also a turning point for him. He was overwhelmed by the curriculum and learning atmosphere of University of Cambridge and spent almost one and a half years there in order to understand the private education and residential life of the public schools. Sir Syed considered religion as an essential prerequisite to progress but simultaneously understood that it is modern education which helped in making the British the most civilised nation of the world (Graham, 1974).

The Aligarh Movement

The Aligarh Movement was launched by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan along with his associates for the renaissance of Indian Muslims in the second half of the 19th century. Though this movement was multi-dimensional with respect to social, political, economic and educational issues of Muslim community but it was more inclined to the educational aspect.

According to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, it is education which could minimize the sufferings of Indians particularly Muslims. Sir Syed was always secular in his approach but well aware of the fact that it was his community who had suffered most after the defeat in the Revolt of 1857. Muslims were looked with suspicion and kept out of the government service because the British treated them all as would-be rebels. Hunter had also pointed out Muslims' status in the civil service in the year 1871: out of a total of 2,111 posts, 1,338 were engaged by the Europeans, 681 by non-Muslim inhabitants, and only 92 by Muslims (Hunter, 1871).

In the turbulent phase, the Muslims were concerned about their future and Sir Syed wanted to inculcate courage and confidence in them. This was the primary aim of educational policy which was translated into the Aligarh Movement. To remove multiple weaknesses of Muslims in the new environment, he adopted a policy of providing them western education through English medium. The basic purpose of providing modern education to the Muslims was to make them employable in government jobs so that they could improve their living. (Nurullah and Naik, 1945). With this objective in view, he laid the foundation of Scientific Society in 1864 in Ghazipur. The main objective behind the starting of this Society was:

1. To translate English books on Literature, Science, Agriculture and Engineering in Urdu.
2. To develop rational and scientific attitude among Muslims.

Later on, Society was shifted to Aligarh with Sir Syed. In 1866, the Scientific Society published a journal "Aligarh Institute Gazette" which comprised both Urdu and English languages (Muhammad, 1978). It aimed to remove the misconception between the Muslims and British government, so that they could work together for the cause of educational upliftment among Muslims. It also discouraged publishing of religious books. Sir Syed knew that in the contemporary experimental age, one has to be more rational and he encouraged scientific and experimental method of teaching and learning in the educational institutions (Muhammad, 1972).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan acknowledged the fact that Hindus in Bengal understood the new scenario and monopolized the knowledge of English and were being absorbed in the administration. Almost after a decade, he founded the M. A. O. College (Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College) in Aligarh. This College in later years became the Aligarh Muslim University. His revolutionary effort in this direction gave rise to a new generation of Muslim intellectuals who favoured and worked for the dissemination of modern education.

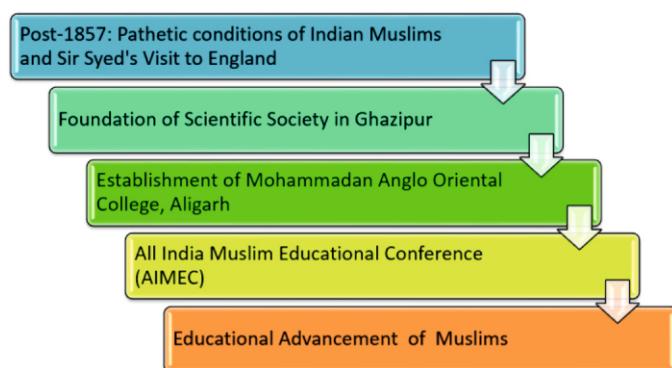


Figure 1: Aligarh Movement: From Sir Syed's Vision to Mission

In the continuation of his mission (Aligarh Movement) for the welfare of Indians, particularly Muslims, Sir Syed organized the All-India Mohammedan Educational Conference (AIMEC) in 1886. Earlier it was known as All-India Mohammedan Educational Congress. It propagated the message of importance of education, particularly modern education for the upliftment of the community. This conference worked efficiently and almost unfailingly met annually in different cities of the country in order to provide a common platform for the encouragement of modern education among the Muslims. It regularly passed resolutions and tried to overcome the social and educational problems of the community (Muhammad, 2002). It disseminated the message and mission of Sir Syed in other parts of the country.

Mohammedan Educational Conference further provided opportunities for the exchange of thoughts and propagation of reform ideas in the new situation. The activities of AIMEC helped the Muslims of other parts of the country and its effects were far-reaching, e.g. in Bombay it worked for the cause of Muslim education in the presidency, especially modern education. Similarly, it worked for the promotion of education among Muslim women, and so on.

Conclusion

It can be inferred from the study that Sir Syed had realised early that the pathetic and deplorable conditions of Indian Muslims was due to the lack of modern education in the British rule. His vision for education was to create a link between traditional and modern educational system. He wanted the Muslims to discard their prejudice against the British and acquire modern education while observing religious values. He strongly believed that the Muslims should entertain modern education introduced by the British if they want to get employment in the administration of the country under the British rule. Also, Shah Waliullah's thought of ijtihad helped him in the reconstruction of educational system. He boldly took concrete steps in chalking out his mission for the betterment of his community. His educational ideas took shape in the form of M.A.O. College (now Aligarh Muslim University). Sir Syed's Educational Movement was incredible in the progress of Muslim education throughout the continent and inspired the coming generations of Indians in general and Muslims in particular to establish schools and colleges.

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